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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the vision of the child as a member of a community has been reflected in and has helped shape recent research in language arts education in early childhood. The paper discusses how researchers in language arts education have focused on (1) a range of genres (socially defined language events), including how children use oral and written language to construct or respond to narratives, to explore and gain information about the world, and to offer information to others; and (2) individual and sociocultural variation in children's language usage, emphasizing differences in the kinds of genres with which children are familiar. The paper weaves discussion of these themes of dialogue, of genres, and of individual and sociocultural variation (as exhibited in a K/1 classroom of active talkers, readers, and writers who nevertheless scored low on standardized tests) throughout a discussion of research on young children's language use, including their talking, writing, and responding to literature. The paper also considers curricular and assessment issues raised by the teacher and students in that classroom. The paper concludes that classrooms supported by the kind of research reviewed in this paper value language as just one critical tool that children and teachers use to make sense of experience and that both curriculum and assessment for all children need to be developed from within, within classroom communities that acknowledge the uniqueness of each child. One hundred seventy-two references are attached. (RS)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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VISIONS OF CHILDREN AS LANGUAGE USERS: RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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VISIONS OF CHILDREN AS LANGUAGE USERS: RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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During the latter part of this century, developmentalists have portrayed children as constructors—inventors—of their own gradually evolving understandings of the world. While children are becoming speakers, writers, and readers, they are also meaning makers, making sense of what surrounds them (Piaget, 1954; Smith, 1975; Wells, 1986). The meanings children create for themselves are interwoven with the social history each child brings to educational settings (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the child is not a lone scientist, but an active participant in a community, a culture. In Bruner's words:

> I have come increasingly to recognize that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. It is this that leads me to emphasize not only discovery and invention but the importance of negotiating and sharing—in a word, of joint culture creating as an object of schooling and as an appropriate step en route to becoming a member of the adult society in which one lives out one's life. (1986, p. 127)

In this report, we discuss how this vision of the child as a member of a community has been reflected in and has helped shape recent research in language arts education in early childhood. To introduce our review, we present a slice of classroom life in an urban K/1 classroom. The talk among the first graders and their teacher, Genevive, foreshadows the research themes and issues we explore.

Genevive's first graders have just finished taking a standardized test and are eager to voice their opinions about their initiation into this school ritual. Genevive explains to the children that the test is required by the school board.

Shawnda: But why would the school board give us such a hard test? We never gave them a hard test.

Genevive: That's a good question for you to ask them. . . . What else might you want to ask them?

Monique: Why did you just give us a hard test? Because some of us don't really think that it's good, 'cause me and Maya started to cry. And it was hard for some of us.

Many other children express similar sentiments. Edward J., however, begins to get silly:

Edward J: I would write [to the School Board], "Scram, beat it, get lost."

Genevive: But would they know what you meant?

Eugenie: They would get mad.

Genevive: Would that help? . . .

Eugenie: They'd mark it wrong.

And Edward offers a more appropriate sentence:

Edward: That test is hard.

Genevive suggests that the children act on their concerns and write to the School Board. She talks to them about how letters should start, and they begin writing their own letters to the School Board, in their own handwriting, using their own ways of spelling. Mollie offers Genevive a suggestion:

Mollie: I think that what you should do is when [we're] done, you should read them 'cause they might not be able to understand them.

Genevive: After I read them, I'll see if they need editing.

Through dialogue, Genevive and her children had become a group of people whose lives were socially bound together—they had become a community. As members of this community, Genevive's children were eager to articulate their ideas about a significant experience. With Genevive's guidance, they participated in a complex activity, in which oral and written language were both necessary. In this way, their activity reflected the emphasis in recent language arts research on how children learn language, oral and written, as they use language in *interaction with other people in purposeful activities*.

Further, undergirding much recent research is an assumption that the goal of the language arts curriculum is to help children gain control over the use of oral and written language for a range of purposes in a variety of situations, that is, that children will become more *communicatively competent* as community and, more broadly, as society members. In Genevive's activity, both Genevive herself and one of her children, Eugenie, called Edward's attention to the situational consequences of his way of expressing his opinion, and Genevive offered all the children specific information to help them better accomplish their communicative end.

As we will discuss, researchers in language and language education have focused on a range of *genres*, or socially-defined language events—among them, how children use oral and written language to construct or respond to narratives or stories, to explore and gain information about the world, and to offer information to others. They have also focused on *individual and sociocultural variation* in children's language use, emphasizing differences in the kinds of genres with which children are familiar. This vision of language learning as occurring in the context of meaningful, interaction-rich activities has raised many pedagogical issues. Indeed, Genevive's children were themselves raising them. The children—active talkers, writers, and readers—had performed poorly on the state standardized achievement test, and they knew that they had (not because Genevive told them so but because they were intelligent children aware of their own difficulties). In such measures of skills, the competence of the children, many of whom were from minority and/or low income homes, was not evident. What is to be made of this? that the children are not learning their "skills"? or that the tests are not testing the children's skillfulness?

In the following sections, these themes of dialogue, of genres, and of individual and sociocultural variation will be woven throughout our discussion of research on young children's language use, including their talking, writing, and responding to literature.

While written and oral language use are intertwined, we highlight first oral and then written language. We next consider the curricular and assessment issues raised by Genevive and her children and, finally, the implications of the reviewed research for teachers and children.

The Beginnings of Communicative Competence

The Interactive Infant

The story of children's communicative development is embedded in their individual histories and so begins well before first contacts with schooling. Most theorists agree that human beings are born to become language users. For example, the linguist Chomsky (1965) believed that only an innate ability could enable children to acquire language so early in life. This inborn mechanism was called the LAD, or Language Acquisition Device (Chomsky, 1965; McNeill, 1966). Current theorists and researchers assume such a mechanism exists, but they highlight the interaction that must occur between a LAD and aspects of the learner's social world. As thinkers and rule formulators, children play the key role in learning the complex system of rules that make up a language. They build upon innate abilities as they actively learn from people and objects around them, or LASS, the Language Acquisition Support System (Bruner, 1983), which caregivers and others provide from birth on.

Although to many people the first days and months of life are a time of sleeping, nursing, and crying, to the careful observer, they are a time of rapid growth. Infants who seem to "just lie there" are from birth in a periodic state of "alert inactivity" (Wolff, 1966) when they are taking in what goes on around them. During these times they are impressively perceptive, as if they are preparing for full participation in a community dialogue. For example, newborns (who demonstrate greater attention by more frequent sucking on a pacifier) prefer to listen to human speech, rather than music or other rhythmic sounds (Butterfield & Siperstein, 1974); by 6 weeks they prefer to look more closely at faces that speak, rather than those that don't (Haith, 1980); and at 3-4 months they can notice when something is "out of sync," or when a speaker's words are not synchronized with mouth movements (Dodd, 1979). These studies show that infants are born not only to learn language, but also to perceive the distinct aspects of communication: listening, as well as watching and coordinating what they see with what they hear.

In short, the current portrait of the developing infant is a much more interactive one than that of 20 years ago. Thus, parents and out-of-home caregivers feel a responsibility to provide a safe environment that also allows for broad exploration and for the development and orchestration of perceptual, motoric, social, and linguistic abilities.

The Development of Symbol-Making: The Young Child as Oral Communicator

Children as communicators come to the foreground as soon as they are able to mesh with others, for example, through eye contact or smiling. These nonverbal behaviors develop within the first 3 months of life as child and adult begin the "dance" that is the basis for their interactive life together (Stern, 1977). The first uses of gesture add to the communicative repertoire. As Vygotsky (1978) explained, children's initial attempts to grasp objects are interpreted by their adult caregivers as communicative; thus the caregivers respond to children accordingly, and children's grasping movements become communicative acts of pointing.

This first use of a cultural tool—a gesture—to symbolize for others inner wants and desires initiates the entire developmental history of symbol use in the child, including the use of symbols in literacy development. During the early childhood period, children become fluent and inventive users of many kinds of symbols (Vygotsky, 1978; Gardner, 1982; Nelson, 1985). Like the adults around them, children invest certain kinds of forms—movement, lines, sounds—with meaning, and thus they begin to use the movements of play, the lines of drawing, and the sounds of language to represent or symbolize the people, objects, and events that comprise their world. This ability to organize and express inner feelings and experiences through shared gestural, visual, and verbal symbols is a part of children's human heritage; meaning making, like eating and sleeping, is an inherent part of being alive (Langer, 1967; Winner, 1989).

Children are viewed as meaning makers who are also *language users* when several related capacities emerge: "the capacity to make the self the object of reflection, the capacity to engage in symbolic action such as play, and the acquisition of language" (Stern, 1985, p. 165). Stern refers to this landmark as the emergence of the "verbal self," the self who will eventually be able to manipulate verbal symbols—language—to tell her or his own life story. For many developmentalists, language is the primary enabler of interpersonal relationships. So from the beginning the child acts to become a participant in a community dialogue, toward the "acquisition of shared meaning" (Nelson, 1985), through the use of gestures and sounds.

Usually between their first and second birthdays, children combine sounds meaningfully to utter their first words. Although folk wisdom would say that children learn these by imitating what adults say, researchers demonstrate repeatedly that words that young children learn are always embedded in their own meaningful experiences. Nelson (1973), for instance, found that children's first 50 words include mainly nouns which, in addition to being present in the environment, name objects that children act upon or manipulate. She theorized (Nelson, 1985) that once the child is able to represent experiences mentally, she develops "event representations" of recurring events like feeding or bathing. Concepts, such as "milk," that are part of the events develop concurrently and are later labeled. This conceptual view of language development highlights the child's own point of view and her need to experience events, conceptualize them, and use language to refer to them.

The acquisition of syntax, the component of language that many call *grammar* and that refers to relationships among morphemes or words in sentences, follows the one-word stage. The multiple meanings children weave using two-word combinations have been the subject of numerous studies, which aimed to describe children's early grammars (Brown, 1973; Braine, 1963; Ervin & Miller, 1966). These combinations, the children's first "sentences," conveyed certain basic meanings about who performed actions (referred to as Agent + Action), where they occurred (Action + Locative), what objects were like (Attribution), and so on. Researchers have also described the development of later utterances, such as complex sentences and those including conventional verb forms (Bloom, Rispoli, Gartner, & Hafitz, 1989; Gerhardt, 1989) as they add to what is known about the child as a learner of syntax or "'grammar explorer'" (Bellugi, 1988, p. 155). Further, such studies extend to include acquisition processes in languages other than English (Hakuta, 1985; McLaughlin, 1984; Slobin, 1985; Wong Fillmore, 1982). Whether children are learning one or more languages, they are consistently portrayed as resourceful and active thinkers and symbol-weavers.

At the same time, researchers continue to investigate the ways in which preschoolers use language to participate in the life of their communities. As Garvey and Hogan (1973) noted, young children often appear to be *sociocentric*, rather than egocentric.

They show awareness of the interests and feelings of others well before age 7 or 8, the stage of concrete operations (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Some two-year-olds, for example, can contribute to conversations about feelings (Dunn, 1987); and preschoolers can take the perspective of others and demonstrate the beginnings of logical inference when features of a task are familiar and sensible to them (Donaldson, 1978, 1987; Tizard & Hughes, 1984).

Early Language Socialization: The Child as Social Explorer

For the past 20 years, researchers have studied children not only as "grammar explorers," but also as "social explorers" (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972; Corsaro, 1985) and, during the past decade, as "literacy explorers" (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). The fundamental work of investigators interested in the social aspects of language—sociolinguistics—called educators' attention to *language variation*. The person with communicative competence is one who can vary or adjust genres or styles of speaking to fit particular social situations (Cazden, 1970; Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1977; Labov, 1970). How these genres develop in early childhood has been the focus primarily of cross-cultural researchers who document the ways that members of a family or community socialize children into what Heath (1983b) calls the group's "ways with words." These researchers have demonstrated the notable differences among groups around the world (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Snow & Ferguson, 1977). A recent example (Toda, Fogel, & Kawai, 1990) contrasts mothers of 3-month-old infants in the U.S. with mothers of 3-month-olds in Japan. U.S. mothers presented more information in speech to their children than did their affect-oriented Japanese counterparts, who used more baby talk and playful sounds.

Such culture-specific ways of talking continue as children become speakers themselves. As Miller (1982) observed family interactions in the white working-class community of South Baltimore, she concluded that the early grammar of the three girls she studied was similar to those of middle-class children studied earlier (Bloom, Lightbown, & Hood, 1975). The interactions, however, contained more examples of "direct instruction" than middle-class interactions do. For example, the mother of one subject, 23-month-old Amy, would say things like, "Tell her [your cousin], say 'keep off'"; and Amy would respond with, "Keep off. Keep off" (Miller, 1982, p. 75).

Heath (1983b) found similar patterns of interaction in a white working-class community in the Piedmont Carolinas. Her data reflected the adults' belief that they tell children what to say, that they teach appropriate ways of interacting. In contrast, Heath also recorded examples like the following in a nearby African American working-class community:

> At 18 months, Lem was playing on the porch with a toy truck while his mother [Lillie Mae] and neighbor [Mattie] discussed Miss Lula's recent trip to the doctor.
>
> Lillie Mae: Miz Lula done went to de doctor.
>
> Mattie: Her leg botherin' her?
>
> Lem: Went to (rolling his truck and banging it against the board that separates the two halves of the porch) de doctor, doctor leg, Miz Lu Lu Lu, Rah Rah Rah
>
> (Heath, 1983b, p. 92)

In this community, in which children also successfully learned to talk, adults did not believe that they taught children to talk but rather that children learned by attending to the conversations of others, much as Lem does here.

On the other side of the world, Schieffelin (1986) found examples of "direction instruction," when the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea enacted routines (predictably patterned interactions) in which adults told beginning speakers (about age 2 years) exactly what to say. As in other cultures, the children did not always comply, but adults persisted with their customary ways of interacting. Schieffelin also observed other routines, such as teasing, which had specific functions within the Kaluli culture. Adults tease even prelinguistic children although they reserve provocative forms of teasing for children over 2 years of age. For example, one mother repeatedly told her 30-month-old daughter that her baby brother had died. When the daughter began to cry, the teasing mother quickly distracted and calmed her. According to Schieffelin, such interactions prepare children for culturally appropriate responses to grief as adults.

Dore (1989) analyzed the speech of an upper-middle-class girl named Emily, whose talk was recorded with her parents and without them. The child-as-conversationalist was evident in this dialogue in which Emily and her father have been talking about a trip to Childworld; the father has already described it twice:

(. . . indicates a pause)

Emily: Say again.

Father: One more time . . . and then we go to bed. On Saturday . . . we're gonna go to Childworld and we're gonna buy diapers for Emily and diapers for Stephen [her younger brother] and an intercom system so we can hear Stephen in different parts of the house . . . Good night . . . Hon. I love you.

Emily: I sleep in here.

Father: I love you, Sweety.

(Dore, 1989, p. 257)

Emily, aged 23.5 months, appears to have no trouble sustaining this conversation, perhaps so she can delay the time when she is alone. Shortly afterwards in response to her crying, her father reminds her that babies like Stephen cry but that "big kids" don't. Thus Emily is socialized into her family's world of a house large enough for an intercom, verbal expressions of love, trips to the store, and norms for the behavior of big kids.

These examples of "ways with words" demonstrate not only that socialization through language occurs differently in different groups and cultures, but also that these "ways" are at the heart of each culture and so are taken for granted within it. Outside observers need to remind themselves that the *meaning* of events varies from culture to culture. So for middle-class parents in the United States, Schieffelin's example of the Kaluli's teasing might be interpreted as cruel; but for the Kaluli it is a necessary part of learning to be a competent member of the community. Similarly, varied ways of socializing children across cultures within the United States have purpose and meaning within the cultures.

Socialization through Talk: The Child as Story Teller

Where Do Stories Come From?

> . . . Daddy said buy diapers for Stephen and Emmy and buy sokething [sic] for 'tephen . . . plug in . . . and say ahhh . . . and put . . . the . . . in . . . on Saturday go Childworld . . . buy diapers for Emmy and diapers for the baby . . . (deleted data)
>
> And the (unclear: next over?) the next people that came. Then . . . babies can cry but—big kids like Emmy don't cry . . . they go sleep but the babies cry . . . (?) everybod—the big kids like Emmy don't cry. The big kids at Tanta's cry and (say dah) but the big kids don't cry.
>
> (Dore, 1989, p. 259)

This is a bit of 2-year-old Emily's monologue, recorded after her father left the room. Is it an early example of Emily's ability to tell her own stories? Dore suggests that it is. Although Emily is verbally precocious, the researcher proposes that all children begin to use contrasting language *functions* very early in order to accomplish their own personal and social goals. He uses the term *genre* (after Bakhtin, 1986) to refer to a way of organizing linguistic content, style, and structure, what others might call a *register* (Ferguson, 1977) or *code* (Berko Gleason, 1973; Gumperz, 1982). The way that adults talk to young children, sometimes called "baby talk," is a vivid example that incorporates both content and syntactic structures appropriate for children. It is also distinct from other ways of speaking, that is, it has a recognizable style.

Emily seems to *play with* the genres she hears and uses in the special social-interactive "envelope" she shares with her parents, just as Lem (Heath, 1983b) played with the words adults around him wove as he played with his toy truck. A parallel situation is explored by Miller, Nemoianu, and DeJong (1986). Drawing on Miller's study of language acquisition in South Baltimore (1982), they point out that the observed mothers and children contrasted with middle-class families who often develop fictional stories, based on book-reading routines. Miller's families instead engaged chiefly in factual storytelling throughout the day. This rich experience with stories would seem a good foundation for literacy learning in school (see also Miller, Potts, & Fong, 1989). Since the supposedly single genre of "storytelling" is woven differently in different families and communities, we would expect Lem, Emily, and Miller's subjects, Amy, Wendy, and Beth, to tell distinctive stories in school. *All* children learn a range of complex genres that they weave according to the ways of their families and communities.

Stories Told in School

Children tell their own stories in a range of situations. The most familiar one in early childhood settings may be that of sociodramatic play when children assign roles and enact scenes based on actual or imagined experience. Play of this kind blends a number of abilities and skills, for example, the ability to symbolize, to make one object or person stand for another, and to use language as a means of initiating and negotiating play, as well as the means for carrying it out (Garvey, 1977; Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982; Genishi & Galvan, 1985; Paley, 1981). Children capture what they know about physical reality and rules for living together—in other words, what they know about the world. This interaction illustrates how play provides the setting for negotiation that is child-, not teacher-, directed:

Tessa: I'm the mother!

Lee: Un unh, I'm the mother! I'm the mother. She said I'm the mother.

Teacher: You can have two mothers.

Lee: No, we have to have one mother.

Tessa: Two.

Lee: One.

Tessa: Two.

Teacher: Lee, in our house we can have two mothers.

Tessa: I can be the grandmother.

Lee: No, we don't need a grandmother.

Tessa: Yes!! You and me can be a sister, you and me can be sisters, and Lee's the mother, OK?

(Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982, pp. 60-61)

In centers and classrooms many adults naturally and unconsciously make judgments about play and stories that don't sound like the pretend-worlds they knew or published "story books," with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Cazden (1988) gives a striking demonstration of such judgments, based on 12 (5 black and 7 white) graduate students' responses to the following contribution to sharing time:

At Grandmother's

Leona: On George Washington's birthday I'm goin' ice my grandmother
we never haven't seen her since a long time
and and she lives right near us
and she's and she's gonna
I'm gonna spend the night over her house
and every weekend she comes to take me
like on Saturdays and Sundays away from home
and I spend the night over her house
and one day I spoiled her dinner
and we were having we were
she paid ten dollars
and I got eggs and stuff
and I didn't even eat anything.

(Cazden, 1988, pp. 17-18)

The students' responses to first-grader Leona's story varied; white raters judged it negatively, saying it was "a terrible story" and that the child would have problems with school work. In contrast, the black respondents viewed it positively; they said it was easy to understand and full of detail and interest. In fact, three of the black raters thought it was

the best of the five stories they'd heard. Such divergent responses show that stories, like other ways of communicating, embody the social and linguistic styles and values of particular cultures. Thus, stories are similar to other culturally-derived genres and dialects: there is nothing inherently "better" about one style of story-telling over another, just as there is nothing inherently better about one dialect over another. The stories in most children's books and textbooks reflect only a single middle-class style, which can be appreciated along with other less school-like styles and which through exposure and interaction can be learned in the classroom (Heath, 1983a).

Socialization through Talk: The Child as Student

"At first it did not occur to me I was supposed to talk or to pass kindergarten. . . . It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery" (Kingston, 1976, p. 193). This is how novelist Maxine Hong Kingston recalls her silent kindergarten year in a California public school. In fact as a Chinese speaker, she "flunked" kindergarten because she was unaware of the demands of her classroom. Through poignant stories like hers, we discover what classroom researchers also tell us: the classroom is a communicative setting full of rules that are mysteries to some young children. The unstated rules vary: "answer when asked a question," "speak when you have 'free choice' time," "don't speak when you're working," "speak English at all times," or even "speak whenever you want." Each classroom or teacher has complex rules, depending on the teacher's, center's, or school's social and linguistic values.

One of the most common rules for child-teacher talk is, "answer when asked a question even if the teacher already knows the answer" (Labov, 1970; Mehan, 1979). This test-like situation, the "school-talk" genre, is one that many middle-class children are familiar with because their parents have asked such questions during countless comfortable interactions at home, for example, games like peek-a-boo or book-reading (Cazden, 1983; Ninio & Bruner, 1978). In contrast, in the African American working-class community that Heath (1983b) studied, parents did not ask children test-like questions about things present or visible. Instead they asked for analogic comparisons ("What's that like?"); the question was genuine since the adult did not already know the answer. So, although working-class parents may talk about topics that appeal to their children in engaging ways (Tizard & Hughes, 1984), they may not include "test-like" questions to which adults already know the answers. A purpose of the researchers making this point is again not to judge the different ways of speaking as better or worse, but to alert educators to differences that may affect how children learn in school. The research highlights the need for early childhood teachers' general knowledge about differences, sensitivity, and nonjudgmental attitudes toward the genres they hear.

Socialization through Talk about Print: Childhood Literacy Begins

Recent research on young children's literacy development has documented how children make use of and acquire knowledge about written language, just as they do oral language, through interaction with others. Just as Genevive introduced her young students into a genre of literacy use, so too do parents and other caregivers initiate children into a range of literacy genres in homes and communities. They do not do so through planned lessons, but by demonstrating and engaging children in everyday literacy activities.

Indeed, even in communities where literacy assumes a relatively minor role, children are not isolated from written language (Heath, 1983b). In our society, they are surrounded by traffic signs; dotted lines for signatures; and labeled cans, boxes, and even clothes. So, even though they themselves do not conventionally read and write, children may take to pen and paper, participating in literacy activities with more skilled others,

exploring and playing with print's functions and features, and thus using it as a means of social connection, self-expression, and individual and joint exploration of a basic cultural tool (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1975; Gundlach, McLane, Stott, & McNamee, 1985; McLane & McNamee, 1990; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). In Nelson's (1985) terms, print is part of the scripts of children's everyday lives.

Studies of children's initiation into literacy in the home highlight qualities of environments that help literacy become an interesting and valued part of children's lives. The most extensive of such studies is that of Heath (1983b), who, as discussed above, documented language use in two working-class communities and in the homes of middle-class teachers in the Piedmont Carolinas. Individuals in all three settings were literate, in that all made use of written language. For example, in all communities, people made lists and wrote notes. However, only children in the middle-class homes were involved in a kind of literacy activity particularly valued in early childhood classrooms—elaborate talk about fictional storybooks.

Children of the middle class teachers, both African American and White, were socialized to become members of a society in which books and information gained from books play a significant and ongoing role in helping one learn about the world. From as early as age 6 months, parents interacted with children during book-reading events in ways which paralleled the school-talk genre, including that of primary-grade reading lessons.

Children from the observed white working class community were also involved in book-reading events, but these events centered on alphabet and number books, "real-life" stories, Bible stories, and nursery rhymes. In both conversations about such books and children's and adults' oral stories, the focus was on factual reporting of events. Similarly, children from the observed African American community had much experience with story and with the print in their environment but not with story-reading events. Instead, children heard and told a kind of story that was, in some ways, unique to their cultural heritage. The stories, which could be performed rather than simply told, were fictionalized versions of true events that put those familiar events into new contexts.

Heath's work thus highlights the variation in kinds of experiences with literacy that children bring to school. More broadly, it highlights variation as well in the nature of stories—oral, written, factual, fictional—and in how stories or experience in general is talked about; its elements may be labeled, its events recounted, its nature linked to other experiences in other places, including in other books. Further, as also emphasized by Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984), these variations in literacy use come about because of how literacy figures into ongoing human purposes and relationships.

Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith compare literacy experiences as revealed in three distinctive studies of community and family life: Cochran-Smith's (1983) study of preschool children from a Philadelphia suburb attending a nursery school and Schieffelin's studies of immigrant Chinese families from Vietnam, also in Philadelphia, and of families in traditionally nonliterate Papua New Guinea.

The children in Cochran-Smith's study were not, as she comments, "so much surrounded by print as by adults who routinely chose to use print" in a variety of ways. For example, adults labeled children's belongings, used books and other printed materials to introduce or verify new information and experiences, acted as scribes who recorded children's ideas and feelings for self-expression and for communication, and relaxed and entertained the children through story books. At first adults initiated the use of print in response to children's perceived needs but, eventually, the children themselves did so.

Although the Chinese children Schieffelin studied were not from "literate" family environments, they were from a tradition that has long valued literacy and, in addition, were faced with many literacy demands in their new U.S. environment. The school-aged children helped their parents cope with these demands and found for themselves social networks for literacy learning in school. On the other hand, a Papuan mother, at her 2-year-old's request, did interact with the child about books obtained for literacy lessons at a mission. However, the book-reading activity was "to no purpose," in the mother's words. Becoming literate was a part of gaining access to mission life, to life outside the village; it was not a way of becoming a more powerful member of the village itself or of the family. Thus, the activity would seem to have no enduring function in the life of the child.

As Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith note, "one theme that emerges from all of our study examples is that, for an individual to become literate, literacy must be functional, relevant, and meaningful for individuals and the society in which they live" (p. 22). And, as the Chinese children suggest, socialization into particular kinds of literacy use does not need to occur in the home.

Literacy Socialization at School: The Classroom As Literacy Community

The general qualities of environments for literacy learning at home have influenced researchers' efforts to study how these qualities would be realized in the early childhood classroom. First, a number of researchers have, in varied ways, studied *literacy's embeddedness in the daily life of the classroom.* For example, Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon (1986) collaborated with preschool teachers in developing classroom environments for literacy learning. They then studied the nature of the environments the teachers created and how differences in the richness of those environments were related to children's awareness of written language and to vocabulary growth. They thus provided evidence that simple activities that integrate print into children's daily classroom life—activities like having children sign in every morning, making child-level labels and written displays, and providing ample opportunities to explore written materials—can indeed help children learn of the functional as well as the technical aspects of print (letters, sounds, words).

Many of the functions that children experience in adult-guided situations may be explored by them when literacy becomes a part of their daily dramatic play. Thus, researchers and educators have been interested in how adults might encourage this activity through the arrangement of play centers (Hall, 1987). For example, Neuman and Roskos (1990) demonstrated that clearly defined play centers stocked with appropriate literacy props (e.g., the Post Office, the Office) can support play with the social roles and functions of print. On the other hand, other researchers suggest that open-ended "writing centers" may promote valuable exploratory play with print; children explore its visual and orthographic qualities, just as they play with qualities of line and shape in drawing and with the malleable nature of clay in sculpting (Clay, 1975; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Dyson, 1983).

Well-designed classroom libraries also help literacy to become an important part of children's daily routines (Morrow, 1982, 1987; Morrow & Weinstein 1982, 1986). From nursery school through the elementary grades, a cozy corner, filled with a variety of kinds of books, some of which beckon to children from open-faced shelving is a fine place for five or six children to read books alone or with a friend or, perhaps, to listen to a taped story.

While the above studies have detailed the qualities of environments, a second critical aspect of literacy *communities* is *the nature of the talk accompanying literacy activities*. It is talk that reveals the social function and the semantic sense of text to

children. Much research focused on qualities of teacher-child dialogue has centered on particularly valued school literacy activities, especially talk about story.

As part of Cochran-Smith's (1984) study of the Philadelphia preschool, she closely examined the interactional process through which the teacher helped the children enter into the worlds of storybooks. During story reading, teacher and children negotiated the meaning of books together. The teacher paid attention to what the children noticed, understood, or were confused by in the text and pictures. Moreover, through her own responses, the teacher guided the children through different kinds of texts, helping them to experience, to respond to, different genres in different ways—some books are filled with information, some make us laugh, others make us sad in a gentle way.

Any introduction of story into the life of a classroom community can be assumed to affect the life of the children there in some way. Feitelson (1988; Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Feitelson & Iraqi, 1990) has provided illustrations of this influence in Israeli classrooms for children who, unlike Cochran-Smith's children, come from homes with few books. Some children spoke a local Arabic dialect which differs from the literary Arabic dialect used in school texts. Compared to children in control classrooms, children in classrooms with daily story times improved significantly on tests of reading comprehension and other language skills; moreover, the children began to use literary language themselves in the play corner. Indeed, for children from a diversity of sociocultural backgrounds, a daily time for reading and talking about books has been consistently shown to influence strongly children's interest in, knowledge of, and ability to engage with books (for a thorough review, see Galda & Cullinan, 1991).

In one project (Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986), teachers read children serial books about the pranks of a monkey named Kofiko, a set of books not particularly valued as quality literature by teachers but books generally liked by children. The children became fond of the character and even requested Kofiko books as holiday presents. The power of children themselves to bring books into the home in culturally appropriate ways has also been studied by Kawakami (1990).

Another valued classroom activity involving much teacher-child dialogue is story dictation. Vivian Paley (e.g., 1990) has written extensively about the kind of community-building occurring in her own classroom as drama is used to bring children's dictated stories into the classroom community. McNamee, McLane, Cooper, and Kerwin (1985; see also McLane & McNamee, 1990) introduced variations of Paley's story dictating and dramatization activities into ten preschool, kindergarten, and day care center classrooms, serving approximately 200 3- to 5-year-olds. While children in the five control classrooms dictated stories, only the children in the five experimental classrooms dramatized their narratives at a teacher-directed group time. In addition, the children dramatized classic fairy tales, picture book stories, and poems. As McNamee and colleagues suggest, their characters, themes—their wishes and dreams—became a part of the community, and thus the children had a reason to become more active controllers of their stories.

Similarly, in primary grade classrooms influenced by Graves' (1983) work on young children's writing in classroom "workshops," children's skill as written language users is supported by teacher-child dialogue about their written pieces and through much sharing in the classroom community. Teachers hold conferences with children about their work, including their writing processes and products and their evaluations of their own work.

As explained by Sowers (1985), this approach was influenced by Donald Murray's work on writing and teaching writing to older students. To provide developmental

underpinnings for holding conferences, Sowers turns to Vygotskian (1978) theory. Teacher-student interaction during conferences may be internalized by children, so that they begin to ask themselves and each other questions that are similar to those asked them by their teachers. Moreover, the social energy of the classroom community itself—the children's interest in and involvement with each other's texts, may fuel their individual efforts (Dyson, 1987), much as in Paley's classroom.

A third key characteristic of literacy learning is *the existence of sociocultural diversity in ways of using oral and written language*. Researchers and educators have studied how this diversity manifests itself in the classroom. Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) is an exemplary research and development organization which aims to support teachers' efforts to respond to cultural diversity, particularly for Native Hawaiian children (Au & Jordan, 1981; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). Among its most significant aspects have been its emphasis, during reading instruction, on children's comprehension of text and, particularly, on their relating story content to their own personal experiences. Further, this talk about story takes place in comfortable, culturally compatible ways. Rather than teachers calling on children individually to respond to text questions, teacher and children jointly reconstruct the story, voluntarily taking turns in offering comments, overlapping their talk with one another's.

In addition to allowing this "talk story" (this cultural style of co-narration of stories), KEEP also encourages teachers to allow children to help each other so that support for language activities is not dependent only on teacher-intervention. When the KEEP program was initiated at a Navajo Indian Reservation, the Navajo children engaged in much less spontaneous interaction than the Hawaiian children had. In order to support peer interaction and help, the teachers organized the students so that they were in small groups (two or three students of the same sex), a grouping format more comfortable for them.

Sociocultural differences also manifest themselves in children's ways of writing. Dyson (1990b) analyzed the classroom literacy behaviors of a first grader, Jameel, who had a performative, rather than a simply communicative, style of writing stories. He used school story writing events to perform, often exploiting the music—the rhythm and rhyme of language. For example, following is his story about cat and his ill-fated friend hat:

Sat on Cat Sat on Hat
Hat Sat on CAT
CAt GoN [gone.] 911 for CAt

Jameel's stories were not always "sensible" to others who expected literal and explicit sense in stories, even though such demands were not necessarily made of trade books in his classroom, which tended to be rhythmic and repetitive. However, Jameel would use explicit, analytic prose (Chafe, 1982) when he viewed himself as a teacher of someone needing information. Studies of nonmainstream children's stories and/or word definition tasks have suggested students are unable to control expository or explicit, analytic prose (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Michaels & Collins, 1984). Jameel's case thus suggests the importance of looking across social situations before making judgments about a child's language repertoire (Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Labov, 1970).

Jameel's case also emphasizes the importance of children's perspectives on literacy events in the classroom, rather than those of adults in the classroom community. In the next section, we examine more closely children's ways with written words.

The Development of Symbol-making: The Child as Written Communicator

To understand how children make sense of written language, researchers have had to consider children's use of a range of symbolic media. For young children may participate in "literacy" activities by using other, earlier controlled symbolic tools. For example, pictures may be used in ways that foreshadow the use of written language (Dyson, 1982; Gundlach, 1982; Halliday, 1977; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). Many a letter to Grandma or teacher has been drawn.

Researchers must also consider children's behavior in a range of situations for literacy. Children's initial use of any symbolic tool, including written language, is very fluid and flexible, so that they can freely explore its nature and gain some comfort, some familiarity, with its functions, forms, and processes (Nelson & Nelson, 1978; Vygotsky, 1962; Werner, 1948). For example, when children play waiter or reporter, they may use cursive-like script, trying out writing's functional possibilities, without attempting to precisely encode; at other times, they may use scribble or "cursive" writing to encode long stories or letters (Dyson, 1983; Sulzby, 1985a) or they may manipulate the graphic forms themselves without any particular intended message (Clay, 1975). Thus, even very young children's writing varies with purpose.

As children explore the written system in a variety of social situations, they begin to figure out its inner workings—how meaning and print connect. In their earliest writing, young children do not precisely encode meaning. Rather, as in their first drawings, it is the act itself—the gesture and any accompanying talk—that makes the writing meaningful (Dyson, 1983, 1989; Luria, 1983). Children make lines and letter-like marks that approximate the writing of those around them. They may read their own writing or ask others to read it (Clay, 1975). As discussed above, they may incorporate writing into dramatic play, making grocery lists, taking phone messages, and generally carrying on daily business (Schickedanz, 1978; Jacob, 1984). They may offer their graphics to others and thereby confer upon them the status of "gifts" or "presents" (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1982; Taylor, 1983).

When young children begin to realize that forming letters is not enough to produce something readable, they may continue to "just write" letters or to use cursive-like writing for longer discourse, like stories, but attempt particular letters for shorter units, like their names. Indeed, most children have an intense interest in the letters of their own names (see Baghban, 1984, and Ferreiro, 1986, for detailed analysis of young children's explorations of the letters of their names).

Researchers have examined children's construction of the spelling system, documenting early efforts like a 3-year-old's string of circles and curvy lines, to more sophisticated forms like a 6-year-old's ILVBS ("I love 'basghetti") (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Read, 1986). Initially, children may use a certain number of letters or letter-like marks to represent their meaning, hypothesizing a direct and concrete relationship between features of those letters and their intended meaning. Children seem particularly sensitive to the size and age of the referent. For example, one 4-year-old, Marianna, asked for a small number of letters to write her own name and "as much as a thousand" to write her father's name (which had only two syllables) (Ferreiro, 1980).

Such hypotheses introduce many puzzling circumstances for children. For example, the names of fathers and mothers may well have fewer letters than the names of babies. As children resolve such puzzles, their encoding behavior may gradually reflect an understanding that there must be differences in the selection and/or arrangement of letters if there are to be differences in the meanings found there. They begin to search for some sort

of reliable one-to-one correspondence between selected letters and referents. Children often seem to assume that, in carefully pronouncing the referent's name, they will articulate the names of the necessary letters themselves. Thus they write words like *KD* ("candy") and, of course, *TV*. Eventually, as Read (1971, 1986) documented, children may begin to use characteristics of the sound of the word itself to invent spellings, evidence that children are beginning to use written language as a second order or notational system—to use letters to represent sounds, rather than letters being themselves the sounds (Beers & Henderson, 1977).

Young children often "weave" their written words with talk and drawing to create their early stories and reports (Dyson, 1986, 1989; Newkirk, 1987, 1989). Typically the writing itself may label an important object or figure or it may represent the actual words spoken by a drawn character. In time, children must differentiate among all the symbol systems they use as authors. An important resource for this differentiation among symbol systems is the talk children themselves engage in about their efforts. To understand the contribution of peer talk, we must first consider how shared symbol making comes to play a role in peer social life in the classroom community.

Creating Imaginary Worlds in the Classroom Community

As earlier discussed, Paley (1981, 1986, 1990) has described how opportunities to dictate stories allow her young students opportunities to organize their responses to daily experiences—their thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Moreover, articulating those experiences in stories that are then acted out brings each child's themes and scripts into the classroom community, thereby allowing children together to make the world more reasonable, more controlled than any child could alone.

In classrooms, the organization and sharing of experience can happen through the use of varied media. For example, just as they do in storytelling, in their play children transform emotionally significant experiences in order to express and interpret them, to give outer form to their inner worlds. To use Fein's (1987) image, play is a "canvas" in which young children can symbolize ideas and feelings through gestures and speech. As children grow as symbolic players and social beings, they paint the canvas collaboratively with their friends.

In centers and classrooms, children's skill as collaborative storytellers and players may infuse their drawing, as the blank page can also become a canvas for children's shared dramas. For example, two kindergarten boys, Nate and Chiel, playfully enacted Nate's drawing of a person jumping off a diving board:

Nate: Boing, boing, boing (bouncing in his chair) Boing, boing, boing . . . Chiel, I made a picture of somebody diving off the diving board. And there's no water in the swimming pool. Hah hah Hah hah.

Chiel: Oh! I have no head. (feeling above his head and playing along with Nate)

The written words of kindergarten and early primary grade children often do not capture the stories enacted through talk and drawing. Dyson (1989, 1991) observed 4- to 8-year old children's symbol-making and social interactions during a daily composing period. The observed children initially relied on drawing and talking to carry much of their story meaning and, also, to engage their peers' attention, just as Nate did. Their writing and dictating served primarily to describe their pictures. In time, though, the children began to attend to each other's reading and planning of their texts, evidencing the curiosity

children have about what their peers are doing (Garvey, 1986). Their playful and critical talk thus engulfed their writing and helped it become a legitimate object of attention, separate from their pictures.

Children began to consider critically the relationship between their pictures and their texts as they assumed more deliberate control over the kind of information they would include in each medium. Gradually, their written stories contained more narrative action, their pictures more illustrations of key ideas. Moreover, they began to use writing playfully to engage their friends. They used friends as characters in their stories, and they also began to plan deliberately to include certain words or actions to amuse or tease them. Thus, the children came to understand that writers and readers interact within—play within—the words, and that, as authors, they were in charge of the interaction.

Responding to Imaginary Worlds in the Classroom Community

The use of multiple media and of peer talk are also themes of research on children's ways of reading and responding to literature. In rereading favorite storybooks, very young children may lean upon the pictures, labeling what they see there, while older children may come increasingly to depend upon print and their knowledge of the specific register of storybooks as well as of the demands of the orthographic system (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985; Sulzby, 1985b). In an insightful analysis of picture books, Meek (1988) details the layers of meaning—the foreshadowing, the ironic twists, the subtleties of theme and metaphor, even the complementary but different genres—that exist in the illustrations of picture books. The "lessons" that children learn from books are not solely about print but about the power of different media.

Moreover, children's own interpretations of text—their understandings of the basic characters, plot and theme, the connections they see to their own lives—are often revealed in children's use of play, drawing, or writing (Hickman, 1981, 1983). Young children's *verbal* understandings of book themes may be expressed in terms close to those of the book. Hickman offers this example: After hearing "The Little Red Hen," a first grader proclaimed that its lesson was that "when someone already baked the cake and you haven't helped, they're probably just gonna say no" (1980, p. 101). The replaying of the tale's themes of cooperation and laziness may occur, not in explicit verbal discussion, but in the child's actual play, as characters, actions, and the very words of the text are recast in new child-constructed contexts. In such ways, children's voices, drawn pictures, and expressive movements help them fill the words on the page with their own memories and images (Rosenblatt, 1978), just as may happen when they draw and write their own stories.

Further, the language, images, characters, and plots of literature can become interwoven into the life of the classroom, just as can those of children's own stories, each infusing the other, passed from child to child in complex ways (Feitelson, 1986; Hickman, 1983). Paley's description of children at play seems, in a metaphoric sense, to capture how children take over stories and infuse them into their own ongoing story as class members:

> The children sounded like groups of actors, rehearsing spontaneous skits on a moving stage, blending into one another's plots, carrying on philosophical debates while borrowing freely from the fragments of dialogue that floated by. Themes from fairy tales and television cartoons mixed easily with social commentary and private fantasies, so that what to me often sounded random and erratic formed a familiar and comfortable world for the children. (1986, p. 124)

Current Issues: Supporting and Assessing Child Language in the Classroom Community

What's an appropriate curriculum?

As we have shown, research on oral and written language development depicts children as impressively healthy communicators who are born to make sense of the situations around them, often through the use of spoken and written language. The situations to which they're accustomed are life-like and meaningful, that is, they contain people and things that are familiar and sensible. By the time they enter an educational setting, all normal children are developing or have developed appropriate ways of learning and communicating within their own families and communities. And once they are in out-of-home settings, teachers need to allow children to *continue* to make sense of situations in light of previous experience.

Because children come to educational settings with varied histories, early childhood educators work to provide curricula that are responsive to diverse groups of children. In other words, the main challenge for educators is to provide a range of developmentally appropriate settings (Bredekamp, 1987), not a single type of setting appropriate for all children.

Once children attend preschool or primary school, choices among types of curriculum may vary sharply. The most widely-debated contrast among types is the "developmentally appropriate" vs. the academic. Broad studies of classrooms that are developmentally appropriate vs. inappropriate provide preliminary evidence that less academically-oriented programs are associated with children demonstrating fewer stress behaviors (Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, & Kirk, 1990). Hirsh-Pasek, Hyson, and Rescorla (1990), measuring such things as academic skills, anxiety, attitude toward school, and creativity, found no academic advantages for middle-class prekindergarten and kindergarten children who attended highly academic (teacher-directed) schools. Further, they reported possible disadvantages in creativity and emotional well-being. An older and controversial study, based on a retrospective look at 54 subjects, also supported less structure or less teacher direction (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986). According to their self-reports at age 15, the former Head Start pupils who experienced the highly structured Distar curriculum more often led socially dysfunctional lives (with stays in reform school or prison) than did pupils in less structured programs.

In terms of curricula for language and literacy education, these often translate into "whole language" (holistic) vs. "phonics" (sequenced and skills-oriented) instruction and are as controversial as those studies contrasting highly-structured vs. less-structured early childhood classrooms. There is controversy partly because the boundaries between terms like "whole language" and "phonics" are fuzzy, especially when one observes the complex and varied activities that occur in actual classrooms. Further, these approaches are associated most often with ways of teaching beginning reading in the primary grades; little research is available on how these approaches vary at the preschool level. For example, Stahl and Miller (1989) reported that whole language or language experience approaches to language arts and reading instruction are more effective in kindergarten than in first grade. Schickedanz (1990), in a critique of this study, pointed out that the greatest number of programs studied showed no significant differences between the approaches; thus, Stahl and Miller's analysis was misleading. Further, she stated that longitudinal data, following the students beyond third grade, were not available, making Stahl and Miller's conclusions less definitive. Other proponents of whole language highlight the narrowness of research methods that purport to contrast different types of instruction. McGee and Lomax (1990) and Edelsky (1990) both argue that critics of whole language often fail to understand the

nature of a "whole-language classroom," which focuses not narrowly on learning to read, but broadly on learning all subject matter through meaningful, holistic uses of language. The point on which whole language advocates and researchers (e.g., Stahl, 1990; McKenna et al., 1990) who are not identified with whole language agree is that more in-depth research is needed comparing different approaches to instruction.

In practice, whole language classrooms are not in the majority. Many studies, including Smith's (1987) of over 400 kindergartens in California, Durkin's (1987, 1990) of kindergartens in Illinois, and Strickland and Ogle's (1990) study of five kindergartens in varied areas of the country, suggest that workbooks and worksheets oriented toward phonics teaching are dominant in kindergarten and primary-grade classrooms. At the same time, there are teachers who favor a flexible child-centered curriculum and combine holistic, language-based activities with occasional purposeful teaching of skills, including letter naming and sound-to-symbol correspondences (see chapter 3 in Perl & Wilson, 1986; Schickedanz, 1989). The controversies that polarize researchers need not prevent classroom teachers from making their own eclectic and sensible choices.

What's appropriate assessment?

Closely linked to the issue of appropriate curricula is the issue of *how best to assess* children as they engage in language arts activities. Again, at the early childhood level, studies of more broadly-based issues are more common than those related only to language. As the number of programs available for young children grows (for example, public-school programs for 4-year-olds, full-day kindergarten, bilingual programs), the number of standardized measures increases. Thus, there are tests that children take before entering preschool or kindergarten and then before entering first grade, which often "sort" children into specially-funded or transitional kindergarten classes vs. regular first grades. Such practices seem to be increasing despite the results of research that show transitional classes and kindergarten retention do little to improve children's school achievement in later years (Smith & Shepard, 1988; Sternberg, 1991).

With respect to language arts education, recent research has focused on assessment of beginning reading. Like other measures of reading achievement, most reading tests are traditional paper-and-pencil ("bubble-sheet") tests. The young children in Genevive's class, introduced as this report opened, already knew about such events—and the issues of fairness they raised. Standardized tests function primarily to provide information not about individuals, but about groups of children to people outside the classroom, such as principals and boards of education. Test scores have the advantage of being "comparable" from school to school and state to state. They are well-designed to measure and compare products, children's performances on specific questions or tasks (Clay, 1990). Thus, they effectively assess a curriculum built upon uniform and specific objectives for all children.

Curricula that are intended to respond to diverse needs (developmentally appropriate or child-oriented curricula) avoid a narrow band of objectives and so are difficult to assess within the traditional framework of testing. So, many proponents of whole language resist this framework, as well as the term *assessment* because of its association with standardized testing; and they reject conventional research methods, which incorporate test scores and numerical outcome measures. These proponents recommend qualitative methods that focus on the processes of teaching and learning in particular classrooms (Edelsky, 1990; Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989). Teachers' own observations and documentations are seen as most appropriate for following progress and learning. This "grass-roots" approach is based on a belief that ways of following (assessing, in our view) what children do and know is intimately linked with the curriculum, what is taught/learned. A major purpose of assessing is to guide next steps in teachers' work with individual children.

Thus, child-oriented assessment has a clear function in daily classroom life; it becomes part of the ongoing dialogue between children and teachers and helps establish the direction that dialogue takes in language arts activities and across the curriculum.

The opposition between these two world views of assessment parallels that between a skills-oriented and holistic approach to language arts. Researchers and practitioners articulate their support of alternatives to traditional testing from varied viewpoints (Barr, Ellis, Hester, & Thomas, 1988; Carini, 1982; Chittenden & Courtney, 1989; Genishi, in press; Genishi & Dyson, 1989; Kamii, 1990; Meisels, 1987; National Association for the Education of Young Children, in press; Teale, Hiebert, & Chittenden, 1987; Wexler-Sherman, Gardner, & Feldman, 1988). Common themes in their writing are that assessment should be conceived of broadly to reflect the abilities of children in a number of domains (artistic and motoric, as well as verbal and mathematical) and that it should reflect the judgments and knowledge of those closest to children, including teachers and parents. Observation of processes of learning, as in early writing, along with means for documenting the processes are also emphasized. Alternative means include portfolios and focused discussion of content in areas such as science and math (Chittenden, in press; Moxley, Kenny, & Hunt, 1990).

For teachers with children whose dialect or language is different from middle-class English speakers, assessment is especially troublesome. Standardized tests for children who know English may penalize the linguistically different, and even tests for bilingual children may be inappropriate for those who are strangers to the school-talk genre and the demands of paper-and-pencil tests (Wong Fillmore, in press). So it is for the children who find dialogue in the typical classroom difficult that alternative ways of assessing language and literacy are most essential. As school children become increasingly diverse, responsive teachers recognize that what is appropriate socially and linguistically in their own communities may not be in their children's. Thus, reserving judgment about children's abilities is a first step in teachers' assessments of what linguistically-different children can do or want to do. Careful observation of what children do is a second step (Genishi, in press; Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Jaggar & Smith-Burke, 1985). A concurrent step is to initiate and maintain dialogues with parents: what do families want for their children? And what are their goals and expectations as children become part of a wider "school culture"? (Delpit, 1988; Wong Fillmore, 1990).

Conclusion

Both curriculum and assessment for all children need to be developed from within, within classroom communities that acknowledge the uniqueness of each child. All children have learned to use symbolic tools—the gestures, sounds, and movements of drawing, play, and dance—to represent the world for themselves and others. They thus gain an understanding of themselves as active agents in a social world—as successful learners who can learn to act on and in their worlds.

In classrooms, teachers, like Genevive, work to expand children's sense of themselves as competent, skillful people who can use language to take action as well as to play and to reflect. They do so by creating safe, affirming, and challenging environments for children, particularly by creating an interactive "envelope"—networks of relationships, a community—within which children can continue to learn. For, in order to learn new ways with oral and written words, all learners must have trust in their teachers, trust that their efforts will be rewarded, their basic human competence respected (Erickson, 1987). Trust in the community can be threatened if children's resources are not recognized.

In the community of the classroom, children are often expected to act through spoken and written language although curricula that are truly child-oriented leave spaces for expression through movement, the arts, spatial or mathematical manipulation, and so on. For as Stern (1985) noted, language is a double-edged sword that can at once join us to a community and distance us from our own deeply-felt nonverbal responses and actions. The kind of classroom supported by much of the research reviewed here values language as just one critical tool that children and teachers use to make sense of experience. Understanding children's social networks in and out of the classroom, their symbolic tools, and their memories and images as carried through those tools may help us transform early childhood classrooms into places where all children can build on the resources they bring.

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